HINDU NONDUAL PHILOSOPHY, SPINOZA, AND THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

by James H. Cumming

This article is a second excerpted from James H. Cumming book, *The Nondual Mind: Vedānta, Kashmiri Pratyabhijñā Shaivism, and Spinoza*, (the first one was published in Dogma winter issue) which is still in manuscript and which can be accessed on Academia. edu. Bachelor of Arts, Columbia University; Juris Doctor, *magna cum laude*, University of Pennsylvania James H. Cumming is a senior research attorney at the California Supreme Court, where he is an expert in philosophy of law. He has also been a scholar of religion for over 40 years. He began by studying Sanskrit and Indian scripture, specializing in the nondual philosophy of Kashmir. Later, he learned Hebrew and completed a comprehensive study of Jewish mysticism. In 2019, he published *Torah and Nondualism: Diversity, Conflict, and Synthesis* (Ibis Press).

My book, *The Nondual Mind*, compares Hindu nondual philosophy to that of Baruch Spinoza, demonstrating the similarity of Spinoza's ideas to Kashmiri *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism.[1] In the previous edition of *Dogma*, I published an introductory excerpt from that book. The present article continues where the previous article left off, constituting a second excerpt from the same book. In this excerpt, I examine the texts of Vedānta, *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, and Spinoza, focusing in particular on texts that address the mind-body problem. Close textual analysis can be difficult, but the effort one invests in understanding these texts promises great reward, for the analysis presented in this article constitutes the heart of my book, and it undergirds many of the book's most powerful and liberating conclusions. Moreover, a comparative analysis of these texts is valuable in its own right, deepening one's understanding of these philosophical systems by tracing significant similarities and distinctions.

The interested reader may want to read my previous article before reading this one. Doing so, however, is not necessary. The previous article discusses two main points: All things are conscious, and all consciousness is consciousness of self. As that article explains in some detail, one cannot be conscious of a thing — anything — without *being* that thing. Hence, subject-object consciousness is an illusion; one knows an outside world only because

1 The simpler term "Kashmiri Shaivism" is misleading because, historically speaking, Shaivism does not divide neatly into a northern type in Kashmir and a southern type in Tamil Nadu. More importantly, even within Kashmir, Shaivism was far from monolithic. The nondual Kashmiri philosophy discussed in the present article is better described as *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, and therefore I will use that term.

one is conscious of its reflection inside one's own being. Whatever external object one may be perceiving, it is always one's own self that is the content of one's consciousness, and one's consciousness of self is ontological, not epistemological. Let us see how these ideas find expression in the texts of Hindu nondual philosophy and Spinoza.

1. The Principal Upanishads

The Upanishads are philosophical discussions that form a part of the Vedas. The philosophy presented in the Upanishads — known as Vedānta — is not consistent in every detail, but one basic principle that emerges is that Brahman (God, or the ground of being) is the same as *Ātman* (the "self" of the universe, or the "universal consciousness"), which is the same as *ātman* (the "self" of the individual, or the "individual consciousness").

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, dating to the early part of the first millennium before the Common Era, explains that at first Brahman knew only itself, but then Brahman divided into countless parts, becoming the consciousness of individual beings. Despite this apparent change, however, consciousness remains one, not many, for those who are awake to the truth:

> Verily, in the beginning this world was Brahman [(i.e., universal nondual consciousness)]. [¶] It knew only itself: "I am Brahman!" Therefore, it became the All. . . . This is so now also. Whoever thus knows "I am Brahman!" becomes this All; even the gods have not power to prevent his becoming thus, for he becomes their self. [¶] So whoever worships another divinity [than consciousness], thinking "[This divinity] is one and I another," he knows not.[2]

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is asserting in this passage that the consciousness each of us experiences internally is not as individual as it seems to be. Instead, the same seamless consciousness — knowing only itself — shines in all things, and when one is aware of that fact, one recognizes one's own innermost self to be the innermost self of all things. By realizing the unity of consciousness, one even becomes the "self" (i.e., soul) of the gods. Based on this principle of universal consciousness, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* rejects dualistic devotional practices, instead urging the worship of consciousness itself. The Upanishad explains that the one God (Brahman) is not an *object* of consciousness, and therefore our relationship with God cannot be a devotional I-and-thou relationship. Rather, God is the *subject* in all conscious things, a being that is knowable only by experiencing one's own consciousness. This point is expressed in a dialog between Ushasta Cākrāyaṇa and the sage Yājñavalkya. The former pleads: "Explain to me him who is just the Brahman, present and not beyond our ken, him who is the Soul in all things." The latter responds: "You could not see the seer of seeing. You could not hear the hearer of hearing. You could not think the thinker of thinking. You could not understand the understander of understanding. He is your soul, which is in all things. Aught else than this is wretched."[3]

Yājñavalkya also makes the point that one cannot be conscious of a thing without *being* that thing, and therefore all perception is really consciousness of self:

2 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10, translated in Hume, Robert Ernest, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads: Translated from the Sanskrit, with an Outline of the Philosophy of the Upanishads and an Annotated Bibliography* (Oxford Univ. Press 1921), pp. 83–84.

3 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.4, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, pp. 111–112.

> Verily, while he does not there see [(i.e., in the state of nondual consciousness)], he is verily seeing, though he does not see; for there is no cessation of the seeing of a seer [in the awakened state] . . . . It is not, however, a second thing, other than himself and separate, that he may see. [The next seven verses of the Upanishad repeat the same principle with reference to smell, taste, speech, hearing, thinking, touching, and knowing. It then continues:] Verily where there seems to be another, there the one might see the other; the one might smell the other; the one might taste the other; the one might speak to the other; the one might hear the other; the one might think of the other; the one might touch the other; the one might know the other. An ocean, a seer alone without duality, becomes he whose world is Brahman, O King![4]

Later, Yājñavalkya elaborates the same basic point:

> For where there is a duality, as it were, there one sees another; there one smells another; there one tastes another; there one speaks to another; there one hears another; there one thinks of another; there one touches another; there one understands another. But where everything has become just one's own self, then whereby and whom would one see? then whereby and whom would one smell? then whereby and whom would one taste? then whereby and to whom would one speak? then whereby and whom would one hear? then whereby and of whom would one think? then whereby and whom would one touch? then whereby and whom would one understand? whereby would one understand him by means of whom one understands this All?[5]

Similar ideas are found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, which also dates to the early part of the first millennium before the Common Era. Again, we are told that it is always one's own self that is the content of one's consciousness, regardless of what external objects one might think one is seeing or hearing. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* explains:

> As far, verily, as this world-space extends, so far extends the space within the heart [(i.e., the locus of consciousness)]. Within it [(the heart-space)], indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess; everything here is contained within it.[6]

The Upanishads thus emphasize the unity of consciousness, but they don't fully explain matter. Instead, the Upanishads seem to imply a form of subjective idealism that gives matter no intrinsic being. The Upanishads state that the material world is merely "name and form," implying (like Plato's theory of forms) that the physical world is just something the intellect attributes or imagines: "Verily, at that time the world was undifferentiated. It became differentiated just by name and form, as the saying is: 'He has such a name, such a form.' Even today this world is differentiated just by name and form, as the saying is: 'He has such a name, such

4 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.23–32, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, pp. 137–138.

5 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.5.15, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 147. See also *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.14.

6 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.3, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 263.

a form.' "[7] No one can deny that the human mind makes the world intelligible by categorizing perceptions according to name and form, but are we therefore to conclude that the material world is merely our projected imaginings with no intrinsic existence? The Upanishads give hints, but they do not explicitly resolve the question.

2. Adi Śaṅkara

Adi Śaṅkara (8th century C.E.) is perhaps the most famous expounder of the philosophical system presented in the Upanishads. Little is definite about Śaṅkara's life, although we can draw a few basic conclusions. He was born in Kalady, a village near Cochin in southwest India. It is said that he lived as a mendicant and died when he was 32 years old, and yet despite his short life, he was unusually prolific. The main emphasis of many of Śaṅkara's writings is that consciousness is universal and unitary, and that it only appears to be individual and manifold because it shines through a countless variety of material vessels. Śaṅkara uses many analogies to illustrate this point. One well-known and oft-repeated example is that of the space ("ether") inside and surrounding a clay jar:

> There is in reality no transmigrating soul different from the Lord [(i.e., universal consciousness)]. Still the connection (of the Lord) with limiting adjuncts, consisting of bodies and so on, is [unquestioningly] assumed, just as we assume the ether to enter into connection with diverse limiting adjuncts such as jars, pots, caves, and the like. And just as in consequence of connection of the latter kind such conceptions and terms as "the hollow (space) of a jar," &c. are generally current, although the space inside a jar is not really different from universal space, and just as in consequence thereof there generally prevails the false notion that there are different spaces such as the space of a jar and so on; so there prevails likewise the false notion that the Lord [(i.e., universal consciousness)] and the transmigrating soul are different; a notion due to the nondiscrimination of the (unreal) connection of the soul with the limiting conditions, consisting of the body and so on.[8]

In other words, just as space is merely space, but when a jar is present, then space appears to be individualized (i.e., the space inside the jar), likewise consciousness is merely consciousness, but when the vessel of the body is present, then consciousness appears to be individualized (i.e., the body's soul). The text quoted above is from Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtrabhāṣya. Below, I set forth two additional excerpts from that text, each making essentially the same point by way of a different analogy. The first excerpt uses the analogy of the sun or moon illuminating an object in space. The second excerpt uses the analogy of the sun being reflected in a body of water. In each case, Śaṅkara argues that consciousness, which is universal and unitary, appears to be individual and manifold because it shines through a variety of material forms:

> [Excerpt One:] Just as the light of the sun or the moon after having passed [invisibly] through space enters into contact with a finger or some other limiting adjunct, and, according as the latter is straight or bent, [the light] itself becomes straight or bent as it were

7 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.7, translated in Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 82.

8 *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I, 1, 5, translated in Thibaut, George, *The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary by Saṅkarācārya*, in *The Sacred Books of the East*, vols. 34 and 38, edited by F. Max Müller (Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1896), vol. 34, p. 51, spelling modernized.

[(i.e., the light becomes visible as the straight or bent form of the illuminated finger)]; so Brahman [(i.e., universal consciousness)] also assumes, as it were, the form of the earth and the other limiting adjuncts with which it enters into connection. (III, 2, 15)

[Excerpt Two:] The reflected image of the sun [in water] dilates when the surface of the water expands; it contracts when the water shrinks; it trembles when the water is agitated; it divides itself when the water is divided. It thus participates in all the attributes and conditions of the water; while the real sun remains all the time the same. — Similarly Brahman, although in reality uniform and never changing, participates as it were in the attributes and states of the body and the other limiting adjuncts within which it abides; it grows with them as it were, decreases with them as it were, and so on. (III, 2, 20)[9]

The main point Śaṅkara is making in each of these passages is that the individual consciousness of the body (i.e., the body's "soul") does not really exist as an independent entity, just as the reflection of the sun in the water does not really exist as an independent sun. Each of these (the soul and the reflection of the sun) only seems to have individuality because of the physical medium in which it appears. In one of his most popular works, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* ("Crest-Jewel of Discrimination"), Śaṅkara resorts once again to the metaphor of the sun reflected in water:

When the limiting adjunct moves, the movement of [the Self's] reflection [in that limiting adjunct] is ascribed by fools to the original, like the sun which is unmoving [appearing to move when reflected in moving water]. Likewise, one thinks "I am the doer," "I am the enjoyer," "I am lost," alas!

Whether on water or on land, let this insentient body wallow. I am not affected by their qualities, even as the space is not affected by the qualities of the pot.[10]

We can summarize Śaṅkara's understanding of Vedānta in this way: The body and even the intellect are part of the material world; they move and act according to immutable laws that govern the material world.[11] Consciousness pervades the body and intellect, as it does all things everywhere, and ordinary people think, "I am the doer," "I am the enjoyer." But in truth, the body has no individual soul, and the one that knows the body's movements and actions is the universal consciousness. Śaṅkara therefore urges: "As the space in a pot merges into the universal space, merge the individual in the great Self."[12]

These texts, and especially the probative analogies they employ, succeed in redirecting our attention to the undivided universal consciousness that hides behind our everyday experience of being a soul piloting a body. But Śaṅkara's writings, like the Upanishads on which they rely, are vague when it comes to explaining precisely how it is that universal consciousness comes to be filtered through so many material vessels, thus assuming the illusory form of so many individual souls. In this regard, Śaṅkara frequently invokes a stark consciousness-matter dualism, as-

9 *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* III, 2, 15–20, translated in Thibaut, *The Vedānta-Sūtras*, vol. 38, pp. 156–159, spelling modernized.

10 *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 508–509 (GRETIL), translated in Grimes, John, *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya Bhagavatpāda: An Introduction and Translation* (Ashgate 2004), p. 255 (Samata edition, vv. 509–510).

11 See *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 549–550 (GRETIL).

12 *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 288 (GRETIL), translated in Grimes, *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, p. 182 (Samata edition, v. 289).

serting that matter, although somehow derivative of Brahman, is completely distinct from consciousness. Thus, despite Śaṅkara's great renown as a nondual master of Vedānta,[13] he does not quite succeed in closing the subject-object divide. For example, he writes:

> Fire is hot indeed but [it] does not burn itself, and the acrobat, well trained as he may be, cannot mount on his own shoulders. As little could consciousness, if it were a mere quality of the elements and their products, render them objects of itself. . . . Hence in the same way as we admit the existence of that perceptive consciousness which has the material elements and their products for its objects, we also must admit the separateness of that consciousness from the [material] elements. And as consciousness constitutes the character of our Self, the Self must be distinct from the body.[14]

Śaṅkara is saying here that the material elements that constitute the objects of consciousness — things such as earth, water, air, and fire (energy) — could no more be conscious than an acrobat could mount his own shoulders. It seems, therefore, that Śaṅkara is more interested in asserting that all consciousness is one than he is in resolving the mind-body problem. It may be that Śaṅkara draws a sharp distinction between consciousness and matter because he wants to break our identification with the body and its mortality, but be that as it may, Śaṅkara repeatedly insists that any connection between consciousness and the body is false.[15] Instead, he focuses our attention on the extreme subject side of the subject-object divide, making even the intellect into an object of consciousness. He urges us to think of consciousness as an infinite field of pure awareness, devoid of differentiating features and therefore one and indivisible. But Śaṅkara's method does not eliminate the subject-object divide; it only accentuates it.

The closest Śaṅkara comes to explaining the ontological basis of matter is his reiteration of the Upanishadic theory that the world is merely "name and form" (*nāmarūpa*) superimposed on Brahman due to "ignorance" (*avidyā*), which for Śaṅkara means that the world is unreal and that only Brahman is real. He says:

> This entire universe, which appears to be of diverse forms through ignorance, is only the Absolute [(i.e., Brahman)] freed from all defective understanding.
>
> A jar, though a modification of clay, is not different from it [(the clay)] as it is essentially all clay. There is no separate entity of the form of the jar apart from the clay. Why, then, call it a jar? It is merely a false imagined name.
>
> No one is capable of showing the essence of the pot to be other than the clay. Hence, the pot is imagined only due to delusion. Clay alone is the true abiding reality of the pot.
>
> All that is, being the effect of the Existent Absolute [(i.e., Brahman)], can be nothing but the Existent. It is pure Existence. Nothing exists other than it. If anyone says there is [something else], their delusion has not vanished and they babble like one in sleep.[16]

13 In Hindu literature, the term "nondual" (*advaita*) most often refers to the unity of the individual consciousness and the universal consciousness, not the unity of subject and object. Thus, Śaṅkara is without question properly described as a nondualist.

14 *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* III, 3, 54, translated in Thibaut, *The Vedānta-Sūtras*, vol. 38, pp. 270–271.

15 See, e.g., *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* XIII, 2; *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 154–164 (GRETIL).

16 *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 227–230 (GRETIL), translated in Grimes, *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, pp. 160–

Thus, Śaṅkara suggests that because the material world is merely name and form, it exists only in the human mind, implying a sort of subjective idealism. According to Śaṅkara, the material world is only an "appearance" or "semblance" (*ābhāsa*), like a magician's trick. It is an "illusory modification" (*vivarta*), "unreal" or "false" (*mithyā*), a "mistake" (*bhrānti*) of perception, a "superimposition" (*adhyāropa*) upon Brahman, analogous to seeing a tree trunk and mistaking it for a person, or seeing mother-of-pearl and mistaking it for silver, or seeing a coiled rope and mistaking it for a snake. Indeed, Śaṅkara resolves a host of philosophical problems simply by denying the reality of the world. For example, although the characteristics of an effect necessarily tell us something about the characteristics of the cause, Śaṅkara insists that Brahman (the cause of the world) is in no sense limited, defined, or qualified by the world's diverse characteristics because they are all illusory. He says:

> [As for Upanishadic passages asserting that the material world and Brahman are the same], we refute the assertion of the cause [(i.e., Brahman)] being affected by the effect and its qualities [(i.e., the world)] by showing that the latter are the mere fallacious superimpositions of nescience[.] [A]nd the very same argument holds good with reference to reabsorption also [(i.e., just as the emergence of the unreal world does not limit, define, or qualify Brahman, so also the reabsorption of the unreal world does not limit, define, or qualify Brahman)]. — We can quote other examples in favor of our doctrine. As the magician is not at any time affected by the magical illusion produced by himself, because it is unreal, so the highest Self is not affected by the world-illusion. And as one dreaming person is not affected by the illusory visions of his dream because they do not accompany the waking state and the state of dreamless sleep; so the one permanent witness of the three states (viz. the highest Self which is the one unchanging witness of the creation, subsistence, and reabsorption of the world) is not touched by the mutually exclusive three states. For [the experience] that the highest Self appears in those three states is a mere illusion, not more substantial than the snake for which the rope is mistaken in the twilight.[17]

The problem with this sort of subjective idealism is that for most of us, a piece of fine pottery is worth a lot more than a lump of raw clay, and if Brahman has taken the name and form of a hard rock, one had better not kick it with one's bare foot. Therefore, name and form is not — at least at the practical level — as dreamlike and illusory as Śaṅkara's philosophy asserts, and even Śaṅkara acknowledges that the material world is not completely false, like the "son of a barren woman." It has a certain mundane (*vyāvahārika*) reality, but it is ephemeral, and our focus should be on the underlying eternal thing (the Self or Brahman) that is the most true (*pāramārthika*) reality.[18]

In summary, Śaṅkara insists on a stark dualism of consciousness and matter while also asserting that the material world is merely a cosmic *trompe l'oeil*. Thus, Śaṅkara solves the mind-body problem not by eliminating the consciousness-matter divide but by denying the outer world's existence altogether. But even so, he adamantly rejects the subjective idealism of

161 (Samata edition, vv. 229–232).

17 *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* II, 1, 9, translated in Thibaut, *The Vedānta-Sūtras*, vol. 34, pp. 311–312, spelling modernized.

18 See *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 350, 501, 503 (GRETIL); *Ātmabodha* 47–53, 57, 63–64.

Buddhist philosophers.[19] Thus, he seems to walk both sides of the line at once.

3. The "City in a Mirror"

Śaṅkara is a master at analogies, and he typically develops his analogies for his readers, using them to powerfully illustrate his ideas. But in *V*ivekacūḍāmaṇi, Śaṅkara makes only passing mention of an intriguing analogy that gains great significance two centuries later in the texts of Kashmiri *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism. Śaṅkara says: "That, wherein this reflection of the world is like a city in a mirror, that Absolute [(i.e., Brahman)] I am."[20] The idea being expressed here, without elaboration, is that the experience we have of being a soul that observes a remote world — what we have been calling the subject-object divide — is merely an illusion. The reflection of a distant city on the flat surface of a small mirror only appears to be a remote; in truth, it is the flat surface of the mirror that one is seeing. Likewise, the observed world only appears to be separate from oneself; in truth, it is only one's own self that is the content of one's consciousness.

This potent city-in-a-mirror simile is not the first time that the doctrine of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*) has played a key role in Hindu philosophical discourse. As we have already seen, Śaṅkara frequently relies on the example of the sun reflected in water to describe the way the universal consciousness is modified by various media to take the illusory form of a multitude of souls. But the city-in-a-mirror simile is fundamentally different from these other uses of the reflection metaphor, for the city-in-a-mirror simile describes the known world as the reflection, and it describes the universal consciousness (i.e., Brahman) as the medium in which the reflection appears. This reversal of the reflection metaphor can be traced to the early centuries of the Common Era, but with the simile of a city reflected in a mirror, it assumes a nondual form.

We have said that Śaṅkara does not quite close the subject-object divide, but the city-in-a-mirror simile helps narrow the gap. It informs us that the seeming separateness of the material world — its objectivity relative to a knowing subject — is an illusion, like the illusion of remoteness that characterizes objects seen in a mirror. And as it turns out, the city-in-a-mirror simile, if applied to all things, even to so-called inanimate things like rocks and clods of earth, resolves the consciousness-matter dualism that Śaṅkara has otherwise only reinforced. Moreover, it does so without denying the reality of the world. What the city-in-a-mirror simile powerfully suggests is that subject and object are really one, and therefore objects of consciousness are also conscious subjects, having the same ontological status as conscious subjects. Consciousness is not a passive and separate knower of an unreal objec-

19 On Śaṅkara's rejection of Buddhist idealism, see, e.g., *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* II, 2, 28–30; *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya* IV, 3, 7; *Upadeśasāhasrī*, Metrical Part, ch. 16, vv. 23–29, and ch. 18, vv. 123–151.

20 *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 291 (GRETIL), translated in Grimes, *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, p. 183 (Samata edition, v. 292). The city-in-a-mirror simile also appears, without elaboration, in the opening stanza of the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*, a Śaiva hymn attributed to Śaṅkara: "I bow to Sri Dakṣiṇāmūrti in the form of my guru; I bow to Him by whose grace the whole of the world is found to exist entirely in the mind, like a city's image mirrored in a glass, though, like a dream, through māyā's power it appears outside; and by whose grace, again, on the dawn of Knowledge, it is perceived as the everlasting and non-dual Self." *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra*, stanza 1, translated in Nikhilānanda, *Self-Knowledge: An English Translation of Śaṅkarāchārya's Ātmabodha with Notes, Comments, and Introduction* (Sri Ramakrishna Math 1947), pp. 233–234.

tive world; rather, it *is* the objective world, and it is conscious only of itself.

But to understand how that philosophical conclusion can be derived from the city-in-a-mirror simile, we need to turn to the texts of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism.

4. *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism

According to legend, the sage Vasugupta (9th century C.E.) had a dream in which Śiva told him to go to a particular rock near where he lived, and there, inscribed on the underside of that rock, he would find teachings that would benefit the world. Vasugupta thus discovered the 77 *sūtra*s ("aphorisms") that constitute the *Śiva Sūtra*s. This large rock sits beside a forest stream called the Harwan in what is now the Dachigam National Park near Srinagar, and the *sūtra*s allegedly discovered there constitute one of the early texts that influenced the development of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism. Vasugupta is also credited with writing the *Spandakārikā* ("Verses on Vibration"), although the actual author of the latter work might have been one of his disciples, Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa (9th century C.E.).

A different disciple of Vasugupta, Somānanda (10th century C.E.), wrote an important work called the Śivadṛṣṭi ("Vision of Śiva" or "Śiva's Philosophy"), and Somānanda's disciple, Utpaladeva (10th century C.E.), wrote a commentary on that text. Utpaladeva also wrote the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* as well as an auto-commentary to that work.

Utpaladeva's disciple was Lakṣmaṇagupta (10th century C.E.), whose disciple was, in turn, Abhinavagupta (10th–11th centuries C.E.). The latter was perhaps the leading scholar and explicator of *Pratyabhijñā* nondualism. Abhinavagupta wrote numerous important texts and commentaries, but for present purposes, two are particularly significant: chapter 3 of the *Tantrāloka* ("Light on the Tantra") and the *Paramārthasāra* ("The Essence of the Supreme Truth").

Abhinavagupta's leading disciple was Kṣemarāja (10th–11th century C.E.). Kṣemarāja wrote important commentaries on the *Śiva Sūtra*s and the *Spandakārikā*, and he also wrote the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* ("Heart of Recognition"), with an auto-commentary. Finally, Kṣemarāja's disciple, Yogarāja (11th century C.E.) wrote a useful commentary on Abhinavagupta's *Paramārthasāra*. Together, these texts provide a good introduction to *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, illuminating its insightful answer to the mind-body problem.

Like the Upanishads and the writings of Śaṅkara, these *Pratyabhijñā* texts use theistic terminology in their presentation of philosophical ideas. But whereas the Upanishads and Śaṅkara refer to God primarily by way of an abstract concept — Brahman (i.e., universal consciousness) — the texts of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism refer to God using masculine names and honorifics associated with a specific figure from Hindu mythology. These names include Śiva, Sadāśiva, Śaṃbhu, Bhairava, and Śaṅkara, but in the context of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, such names should not be thought of as invoking a mythological deity. Instead, like the name Brahman in the Upanishads, these names are used to signify universal consciousness. The *Pratyabhijñā* texts also use feminine names for God — such as *Citi* and *Śakti* — and both masculine and feminine images play an important part in worship and ritual, but it would be a misinterpretation of *Pratyabhijñā* texts to imagine God in solely anthropomorphic gender-specific terms.

Moreover, the most important thing to consider in studying these texts is not their names for God but their assertions that all things, even lumps of clay, are ful-

ly conscious and that this consciousness is, in every case, consciousness of self, not consciousness of another. As we shall see, those assertions imply that the world is real, not mere illusion, and those assertions, not the names used for God, are what most distinguish *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy, aligning *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy with the ideas that Spinoza articulated seven centuries later.

We will begin with the idea that all consciousness is consciousness of self. Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* states: "The objects that are manifested in the present can be manifested as external [to consciousness] only if they reside within [consciousness]."[21] Utpaladeva's point here is that consciousness cannot somehow venture outside itself to become conscious of external objects, for if consciousness ventured outside consciousness, it would then no longer be conscious. Therefore, consciousness can only be conscious of what exists inside consciousness. In other words, consciousness can only be conscious of itself. As Utpaladeva further explains, "[c]onsciousness has as its essential nature [selfward-facing,] reflective awareness."[22] This principle has profound implications as regards the mind-body problem. If consciousness is, in all cases, nondual — conscious only of itself — then the subject-object divide is unreal. In other words, all conscious subjects are the objects of their own consciousness, and nothing can be an object of consciousness without also being a conscious subject. To exist, then, is to be conscious.

Most people believe that consciousness is dualistic — the subject side of the subject-object divide — and they believe it exists only as a special feature of complex living organisms. According to this way of thinking, if a great cataclysm destroyed all complex organisms, then the universe — full of swirling galaxies, stars, and planets — would continue much as before, but known by no one and nothing. On our own planet, the sun would rise in the east and set in the west, vegetation would sprout during the warm seasons, rivers would flow, wind would blow, rainstorms would drench the soil, but all without anyone or anything conscious of it.

But for Utpaladeva, consciousness is nondual — conscious only of itself — and it is the underlying stuff of all existence. According to this view, a universe known by no one and by nothing is, simply put, an impossibility, because the opposite of the word "conscious" is not "unconscious"; rather, the opposite of the word "conscious" is "nonexistent." Utpaladeva's teacher, Somānanda, was particularly clear on this point, asserting that "a clay jar, by comprehending its own self, exists."[23] Somānanda's striking assertion led a 13th century teacher of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism to draw this conclusion: "[T]his consciousness is called being, and this being is said to be consciousness."[24] But Somānanda further asserted that a thing's consciousness

21 *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* I.5.1 (KSTS, vol. 34, 2nd text, p. 14), translated in Torella, Raffaele, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva, with the Author's Vṛtti: Critical edition and annotated translation* (Motilal Banarsidass, corrected edition, 2002), p. 111.

22 *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* I.5.13 (KSTS, vol. 34, 2nd text, p. 18), translated in Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, p. 120. I have made an editorial emendation to the translation to better capture the sense of the word *pratyavamarśa*. Raffaele Torella explains that *pratyavamarśa* is "reflective awareness" or "self-consciousness" that is strongly "characterized by introjection and return to the subject." Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, p. xxiv, fn. 32.

23 *Śivadṛṣṭi* 5.34 (KSTS, vol. 54, p. 187).

24 *Mahārthamañjarī*, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, no. 66, pp. 35, 39.

of itself — its being, that is — is nothing other than God's consciousness of it, for all consciousness is one.[25]

These are powerful ideas, and the later texts of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism draw from these ideas to explain the distinctive features of human consciousness, using the analogy of a city reflected in a mirror to collapse the illusion of separation that alienates us from our experiences.

a. The *Tantrāloka's Pratibimbavāda*

Abhinavagupta was the great scholar and synthesizer of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, and the *Tantrāloka* is his most important work. Chapter 3 of that work presents an esoteric theory of the Sanskrit alphabet, but at the beginning of the chapter, Abhinavagupta outlines his own unique version of the "doctrine of reflection" (*pratibimbavāda*). Here, Abhinavagupta presents the basic principles that underlie the city-in-a-mirror simile, and therefore these verses merit close analysis.

Abhinavagupta begins by saying,

> 2. Light [(i.e., the light of consciousness)] is what bestows luminosity to everything. And the universe is not distinct from it. Or, if it were [distinct,] it could not manifest.
>
> 3. For this reason, the Supreme Lord, who is unrestrained, displays in the firmament of his own self such immense manifestation of the creation and the destruction [of the universe].
>
> 4. Just as discrete [entities] such as earth and water become manifest in an uncontaminated mirror, in the same way the various dynamic aspects of the universe become manifest within the Lord of consciousness that is one.[26]

Thus, Abhinavagupta uses the metaphor of reflection to explain how, despite the appearance of diversity, external objects are nothing but consciousness, just as the diversity of reflected items in a mirror are nothing but mirror.

What follows next, in verses 5 through 43, is a discussion of how the sense organs of the body operate, and Abhinavagupta's model of sensory perception is at least conceptually consistent with how we understand sensory perception today. When one sees a tree, for example, some sort of representation of the tree appears in one's visual cortex, and it is that representation that is actually known, not the external tree. Similarly, according to Abhinavagupta, each sense organ functions very much like a mirror, but he notes that the sense organs are imperfect mirrors, for each can only reflect (or represent) that which corresponds to its nature.

Abhinavagupta analogizes consciousness to these sensory reflectors, but unlike the sensory reflectors, consciousness is a perfect mirror, capable of reflecting every possible characteristic. In other words, consciousness reflects aroma, taste, form, touch, sound, and more, and Abhinavagupta describes this universal reflectivity of consciousness as its purity (*nairmalya*) and its clarity (*svacchatā*). Abhinavagupta next explains that although the universe exists as a reflection in consciousness, nothing exists outside consciousness, acting as the source of that reflection. It is therefore not truly a reflection; rather, it is *as if it were* a reflection. (See *Tantrāloka* 3.44–65.) Abhinavagupta says:

> 57. This [world] is mingled with consciousness [as an image in a mirror is mingled with a mirror]. Its manifesta-

25 See *Śivadṛṣṭi* 5.105–109.

26 *Tantrāloka* 3.2–4 (KSTS, vol. 28, pp. 2–4), translated in Kaul, Mrinal, *Abhinavagupta's Theory of Reflection: A Study, Critical Edition and Translation of the Pratibimbavāda (verses 1-65) in Chapter III of the Tantrāloka with the commentary of Jayaratha* (Ph.D. thesis, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada, August 2016), pp. 227–229.

tion is impossible without consciousness [as an image in a mirror is impossible without a mirror]. Is it not [therefore appropriate] that [this universe] in which there are worlds (*pura*), *tattva*s etc. is called a reflected image (*pratibimbaṁ*) in consciousness (*bodhe*)?

. . . .

59. [Objection:] But the existence of the reflected image (*pratibimbasya*) is impossible without the original image (*bimbaṁ*). [Reply:] What from that? [We do not care about this] for the original image (*bimbaṁ*) is not identical with the reflected image (*pratibimbe*).

60. And therefore, in the absence of this [original image], nothing goes wrong as regards the said definition of the [reflected image]. This question is merely confined to the cause.[27]

Here, Abhinavagupta is explaining that because an original image and a reflected image are not the same thing, the latter can — in theory at least — exist without the former, and the "objection," therefore, comes down to a question of causation. We usually understand the original image to be the cause of the reflected image, and therefore we conclude that the existence of the latter depends on the existence of the former, but Abhinavagupta explains that there are different types of causes, and with regard to the so-called "reflection" of the universe that appears in the mirror of consciousness, the cause is not an object external to consciousness, but simply God's power of self-expression. (*Tantrāloka* 3.61–65.)

In the conclusion to chapter 3 of the *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta briefly revisits the reflection metaphor, using it to describe the awakened practitioner's ecstatic union with God:

268. The [adept] for whom the universe — all things in their diversity — appears as a reflection in his consciousness, that one is truly the universal sovereign.

. . . .

280. [The adept feels:] "All this proceeds from me, is reflected in me, is inseparable from me."[28]

In other words, the adept realizes that everything that appears to be "outside" or "other" is actually only one's own self.

b. The *Śivasūtravimarśinī*

The *Śivasūtravimarśinī* is Kṣemarāja's commentary on the *Śiva Sūtra*s. It does not discuss the doctrine of reflection (*pratibimbavāda*), nor does it make use of the city-in-a-mirror simile. Nonetheless, it makes several important points that are relevant to the mind-body problem and thus bear on our topic. Kṣemarāja's commentary begins with ideas familiar to us from the Upanishads and from Śaṅkara's writings, emphasizing that God's universal consciousness is what each person and thing experiences as the consciousness of its own soul. Kṣemarāja says: "[I]t (the *sūtra*) at first teaches — in opposition to those who hold that there is a difference between man (i.e., the human self) and Īśvara (the Supreme Lord) — that consciousness of Śiva alone is, in the highest sense, the self of the entire manifestation."[29]

Kṣemarāja then makes clear that this consciousness is consciousness of self, not consciousness of another. He quotes a

27 *Tantrāloka* 3.57–60 (KSTS, vol. 28, pp. 65–68), translated in Kaul, *Abhinavagupta's Theory of Reflection*, pp. 276–278.

28 *Tantrāloka* 3.268 and 3.280 (KSTS, vol. 28, pp. 246 and 253).

29 Kṣemarāja's com. to *Śiva Sūtra*s, *sūtra* 1.1 (KSTS, vol. 1, p. 3), translated in Singh, Jaideva, *Śiva Sūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity* (Motilal Banarsidass 1979), pp. 5–6.

nondual text called the *Ucchuṣmabhairava Tantra*, which asserts: "The knower and the known are really the same principle."[30] Similarly, he quotes the following verse from the *Spandakārikā* (verse 2.4): "It is only the experiencer who always and everywhere exists in the form of the experienced."[31] These ideas are, by now, familiar to us. The subject-object divide is unreal.

Kṣemarāja returns to these same ideas in his commentary to the fourteenth *sūtra*: "*dṛśyaṃ śarīram*." Kṣemarāja explains that the word *dṛśyaṃ*, from the Sanskrit root *dṛś* ("seeing," "viewing," "looking at"), refers to every knowable phenomenon, whether an inner state or an outer material object. And the word *śarīram* means "body." Therefore, the *sūtra* can be rendered as: "That which presents itself to one's consciousness is one's body."[32] Kṣemarāja explains:

> Whatever is perceptible, whether inwardly or outwardly, all that appears to [the expert practitioner] like his own body, i.e., identical with himself and not as something different from him. This is so because of his great accomplishment. His feeling is "I am this," just as the feeling of Sadāśiva with regard to the entire universe is "I am this."[33]

As we have said, one is aware of an external object only insofar as it is reflected and represented in one's own being. Hence, whatever presents itself to one's consciousness is quite literally one's own body (*śarīram*). Moreover, external objects only appear to be material when perceived through the mediation of the senses. Their true form (as they are in themselves) is their consciousness of self, just as one's own true form is one's consciousness of self. And because any divisions that appear in consciousness are themselves only consciousness, a wise person recognizes that external objects are — both epistemologically and ontologically — nothing but his or her own self. There is no such thing as other.

c. The *Spandakārikā* and the *Spanda-Nirṇaya*

The *Spandakārikā* is a collection of verses attributed to Vasugupta but perhaps written by his disciple Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa. The title means "Verses on Vibration," referring to the theory that "vibration" or "pulse" (*spanda*) plays a critical role in the underlying structure of the universe. For present purposes, however, the *Spandakārikā* is relevant only for what it tells us about consciousness.

The *Spandakārikā* has been explicated in several important commentaries. Kṣemarāja's commentary is called the *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, meaning "The Comprehensive Study of Vibration." In the Spanda-Nirṇaya, Kṣemarāja employs the city-in-a-mirror simile, using it to illustrate Abhinavagupta's doctrine of reflection (*Tantrāloka* 3.1–65). Among other things, Kṣemarāja's aim is to show that consciousness is nondual — conscious only of itself — despite appearing to stretch across an unbridgeable subject-object divide. The commentary takes the traditional form of a series of objections and replies. Kṣemarāja writes:

> [Objection:] "Well, if this world has come out (i.e., separated) from that Exquisite Mass of Light [(i.e., from uni-

30 Quoted in Kṣemarāja's com. to *Śiva Sūtras*, *sūtra* 1.1 (KSTS, vol. 1, p. 8), translated in Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, p. 13.

31 Quoted in Kṣemarāja's com. to *Śiva Sūtras*, *sūtra* 1.1 (KSTS, vol. 1, p. 9), translated in Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, p. 14.

32 Jaideva Singh translates the *sūtra* as follows: "All objective phenomena, outer or inner, are like [the practitioner's] own body." See Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, p. 57.

33 Kṣemarāja's com. to *Śiva Sūtras*, *sūtra* 1.14 (KSTS, vol. 1, p. 32), translated in Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, p. 57.

versal consciousness)], then how can it be manifest, for nothing can be manifest outside Light [(i.e., nothing exists outside consciousness)]?"

[Reply:] . . . "That (i.e., the world) has not come out from Him [(i.e., from universal consciousness)] as does a walnut from a bag. Rather, the self-same Lord — through his absolute freedom, manifesting the world, on His own background, like a city in a mirror, as if different from Him, though non-different — abides in Himself."[34]

The universal consciousness — called "Lord" (*bhagavān*) in this text — is always one without a second. Therefore, the world does not come into existence as something separate from universal consciousness ("as does a walnut from a bag"). Rather, the world comes into existence as a configuration of consciousness ("on His own background, like a city in a mirror"), and the separation is only apparent ("as if different from Him, though non-different").

Later, in section 2, verse 4, the *Spandakārikā* explicitly declares the unity of subject and object. This is a text that we already encountered above in Kṣemarāja's commentary to the *Śiva Sūtras*:

[W]hether in the word, object, or thought, there is no state which is not Śiva [(i.e., universal consciousness)]. It is the experiencer himself who, always and everywhere, abides in the form of the experienced, i.e., it is the Divine Himself who is the essential experiencer, and it is He who abides in the form of the universe as His field of experience.[35]

By asserting that the experiencer (i.e., the subject) takes the form of the experienced (i.e., the object), the *Spandakārikā* is reiterating the familiar point that consciousness is nondual, conscious only of itself. But, more subtly, by universalizing that principle — by having it apply "always and everywhere" — the *Spandakārikā* is telling us that all objects of consciousness, even those that are inanimate, are also conscious subjects. In other words, the collapse of subject and object into one — which is the central point of the city-in-a-mirror simile — implies the consciousness of all things.

The *Spandakārikā* brings these ideas to a powerful conclusion in section 2, verses 6 and 7, which state:

This only is the manifestation of the object of meditation in the meditator's mind: that the aspirant with resolute will has the realization of his identity with that (object of meditation).

This alone is the acquisition of ambrosia leading to immortality; this alone is the realization of Self; this alone is the initiation of liberation leading to identity with Śiva.[36]

In the South Asian religious tradition, one uses the mantra of one's personal deity as a support in meditation, culminating

34 *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, verse 1.2 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 10–11), translated in Singh, Jaideva, *The Yoga of Vibration and Divine Pulsation: A Translation of the Spanda Kārikās with Kṣemarāja's Commentary, the Spanda Nirnaya* (SUNY Press 1992), p. 29. See also *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, propitiatory verses (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 1), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, p. 2 [everything is "portrayed . . . on the canvas of Her own free, clear Self, just as a city is reflected in a mirror"]; *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, verse 1.1 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 3), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, p. 10 ["This power, though non-distinct from the Lord, goes on presenting the entire cycle of manifestation and withdrawal on its own background like the reflection of a city in a mirror."].

35 *Spandakārikā*, verses 2.4 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 47), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, pp. 115–116.

36 *Spandakārikā*, verses 2.6–7 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 50), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, p. 121.

(one hopes) in the manifestation of one's deity before oneself in physical form. But this text is boldly asserting that the manifestation of one's mantra deity occurs only in the realization that one actually *is* the deity that one has been meditating upon. Moreover, one's immortality, one's self-realization, and one's identity with Śiva are all none other than the direct experience of that subject-object unity. As Kṣemarāja declares, "[o]ne should worship Śiva by becoming Śiva."[37]

d. The *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*

The *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* was written by Kṣemarāja with the purpose of making the ideas of *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy accessible to non-experts. The text's second *sūtra* explains that consciousness does not give rise to the universe in a dualistic sense — as an objective universe separate from and observed by a conscious soul. Rather, as Abhinavagupta said (see *Tantrāloka* 3.3 and 3.49–50), consciousness creates the universe within consciousness. The *sūtra* states: "By the power of her own will (alone), she [(i.e., "consciousness")]) unfolds the universe upon her own screen (i.e., in herself as the basis of the universe)."[38] Kṣemarāja next turns to the city-in-a-mirror simile to explain his point further: "She unfolds the previously defined universe (i.e., from Sadāśiva down to the earth) like a city in a mirror, which though non-different from [the surface of the mirror] appears as different."[39] Like the reflection of a distant city in the flat surface of a mirror, objects of consciousness appear to be remote, but it is only the surface of the mirror that we are actually seeing when we look at a reflected city, and it is only our own self that is the actual content of our consciousness when we perceive an external object. Thus, the subject-object divide is only an appearance, "like a city in a mirror, which though non-different from [the surface of the mirror] appears as different."

In his commentary to the ninth *sūtra*, Kṣemarāja goes on to explain that the illusory subject-object divide arises because we are embodied creatures that use sense organs to acquire knowledge about the surrounding world. Kṣemarāja says:

> When the highest Lord, whose very essence is consciousness, conceals, by His free will, pervasion of non-duality and assumes duality all round, then His will and other powers, though essentially non-limited, assume limitation. . . . (In the case of) knowledge-power, owing to its becoming gradually limited in the world of differentiation, its omniscience becomes reduced to knowledge of a few things (only). By assuming extreme limitation, beginning with the acquisition of an inner organ [(i.e., the intellect, mind, ego, memory, etc.)] and organs of perception [(i.e., the sense organs)], [the universal consciousness] acquires *māyiya-mala*, which consists in the apprehension of all objects as different [from itself].[40]

Imagine, a person who, since birth, is only permitted to see and hear through a camera and microphone located somewhere inside his or her own body. This person would inevitably view internal bodily organs as if they were external.

37 *Spanda-Nirṇaya*, com. to *Spandakārikā*, verses 2.6–7 (KSTS, vol. 42, p. 50), translated in Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration*, p. 123.

38 *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, *sūtra* 2 (KSTS, vol. 3, p. 5), translated in Singh, Jaideva, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam: The Secret of Self-Recognition* (Motilal Banarsidass 1982), p. 51.

39 *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, com. to *sūtra* 2 (KSTS, vol. 3, p. 6), translated in Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, pp. 51–52.

40 *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, com. to *sūtra* 9 (KSTS, vol. 3, p. 21), translated in Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, pp. 71–72.

Likewise, when consciousness — which is infinite and universal — is conditioned by the "inner organ" (i.e., the brain) and "organs of perception" (i.e., the senses) of a particular body, it assumes the contracted form of an individual soul imagining the objects of its sensory perception to be external to it. The universal consciousness then believes "I am small" and "the external world is vast," but it is only the perceptive capacity of the brain and sense organs that is small. In truth, the universal consciousness is unbound, and the entire world is internal to it, as the following verse from Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* describes: "Indeed, the Conscious Being, God, like the yogin, independently of material causes, in virtue of His volition alone, renders externally manifest the multitude of objects that reside within Him."[41]

It is difficult to imagine that we are viewing the world inside out, that the world that surrounds us is really inside us, and that it is conscious in all its parts. It is difficult to imagine that one's own soul is the soul of the universe, ever delighting in its consciousness of its own self. It is difficult, but not impossible.

e. The *Paramārthasāra*

Kṣemarāja's disciple, Yogarāja, wrote a commentary to Abhinavagupta's *Paramārthasāra*, reiterating many of the foregoing themes. For our purposes, his commentary is most notable for its detailed discussion of the city-in-a-mirror simile, using it to describe the nondual nature of consciousness.

The first verse of Abhinavagupta's *Paramārthasāra* refers to the universal consciousness as "Śaṃbhu," an alternative name for Śiva. Addressing Śaṃbhu in the second person, as "You" to whom "I," the writer, come for refuge, the verse says: "To You, the transcendent, situated beyond the abyss, beginningless, unique [(i.e., one without a second)], yet who dwell in manifold ways in the caverns of the heart, the foundation of all this universe, and who abide in all that moves and all that moves not, to You alone, O Śaṃbhu, I come for refuge."[42] Yogarāja's commentary explains that all things — even unmoving, inanimate objects — are conscious by the light of the universal consciousness, for nothing exists outside consciousness.

The idea that a rock or a clod of earth has a conscious self might leave some readers wondering what the rock or earth clod is thinking about. Therefore, verse 8 of the *Paramārthasāra* explains that, although all things are conscious, all things do not have anything like the subject-object consciousness of a human soul, or even an animal soul, and therefore their consciousness goes unnoticed. We already saw in our study of Kṣemarāja's Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam (com. to *sūtra* 9) that nondual consciousness can assume the particularized form of an individual soul only when a physical system is constructed so as to produce within itself a representation of the outside world — as is true, for example, of a living organism with a brain and sense organs. Verse 8 of the *Paramārthasāra* makes the same point, drawing an analogy to Rāhu.

Rāhu is the ascending lunar node (i.e., the place where the moon's orbit intersects the ecliptic when ascending from the southern ecliptic hemisphere to the

41 *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* I.5.7 (KSTS, vol. 34, 2nd text, p. 16), translated in Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, p. 116. See also *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* I.6.7.

42 *Paramārthasāra*, verse 1 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 2), translated in Bansat-Boudon, Lyne, and Kamaleshadatta Tripathi, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy: The Paramārthasāra of Abhinavagupta with the Commentary of Yogarāja* (Routledge 2011), p. 63.

northern ecliptic hemisphere). In astronomy, this node is merely a location in space, but if the moon happens to be "full" (i.e., directly opposite the sun, on the far side of the earth) when this intersection occurs, we on earth experience it as a lunar eclipse (i.e., the shadow of the earth passes across the moon). In Vedic astrology, which focuses on how things appear to an earthly viewer, this ascending lunar node is thought to be an invisible planet that becomes visible during the eclipse. Using that invisible planet as an analogy, Abhinavagupta states in verse 8 of the *Paramārthasāra*: "Just as Rāhu, although invisible, becomes manifest when interposed upon the orb of the moon, so too this Self [(i.e., consciousness)], although [invisibly] present in all things, becomes manifest in the mirror of the intellect, by securing [similarly] a basis in external objects."[43]

Consciousness, in other words, is "present in all things," but what makes the consciousness of an inert lump of clay different from that, say, of a person is the absence, in the former case, of a brain and sense organs that enable the consciousness to manifest itself "in the mirror of the intellect." Moreover, it is only through subject-object consciousness — that is, "by securing a basis in external objects" — that this revelation of consciousness occurs. In other words, we can become aware of consciousness only as the knower of some object. Without objects of consciousness, consciousness itself remains invisible, like light passing through empty space, without anything to illuminate. The implication of this point is profound. Although the true essence of all consciousness is nondual consciousness of self, consciousness only reveals itself in the dualistic illusion of a subject knowing an object.

In commenting on this verse, Yogarāja distinguishes between the absolute "I" and the relative "I." The relative "I" is the "I" that appears in the sentence: "I hear sounds." This relative "I" exists as a subject in relation to a perceived object, and it depends on the perception of the object for its existence. When an object is known, even if that object is only a mental image, then the relative "I" is also known, but when there is no object of knowing, as in dreamless sleep, the relative "I" disappears. In short, the relative "I" is the "I" of subject-object consciousness. By contrast, the absolute "I" is the nondual consciousness that constitutes one's true self. It never disappears, even in dreamless sleep, and according to verse 8, it is "present in all things," but invisibly so, like Rāhu when there is no moon to eclipse. Yogarāja explains:

> Moreover, when [this Self] becomes a matter of awareness in the [cognitive] experience of the "first person," . . . — an experience that occurs to every cognizer endowed with a subtle body whenever objects of sense such as sound, viewed as objects to be known, are apprehended in the mirror of intellect, or, in the mirror of intuition — then, that same Self, its form now fully manifest, is apprehended . . . .[44]

Significantly, Yogarāja — who, along with his teachers, insists that all things are conscious — is quite restrictive regarding the experience of subject-object consciousness, saying that it occurs only when sense objects are perceived "in the mirror of intellect" of "every cognizer endowed with a subtle body." Although everything, everywhere, is conscious, only

43 *Paramārthasāra*, verse 8 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 24), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, pp. 96–97.

44 Yogarāja's com. to *Paramārthasāra*, verse 8 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 25), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, pp. 97–98.

organisms that have a brain and sense organs are constructed in such a way that their consciousness (their absolute "I") assumes the form of an individual soul that is the knower of objects of perception (a relative "I"). Yogarāja says:

> [Nevertheless,] even though [consciousness] is there in the lump of clay, etc., it is widely taken as not being there, in virtue of [the clay's] abounding in *tamas* [("darkness," "dullness")], just like Rāhu in the sky [when not appearing on the orb of the moon].
>
> . . . .
>
> But, ultimately, from the point of view of the Supreme Lord, no usage distinguishes the sentient from the insentient.[45]

Several verses later, the *Paramārthasāra* employs the city-in-a-mirror simile, using it to illustrate that consciousness is really nondual — conscious only of itself — despite manifesting itself in the dualistic form of a subject knowing an object. Verses 12 and 13 state:

> As, in the orb of a mirror, objects such as cities or villages, themselves various though not different [from the mirror's flat surface], appear [there, in the mirror,] both as different from each other and from the mirror itself, so appears this world [in the mirror of the Lord's consciousness], differentiated both internally and vis-à-vis that consciousness, although it is not different from [that universal] consciousness most pure, the supreme Bhairava.[46]

Yogarāja's commentary explicates these important verses in great detail, but Yogarāja's commentary also describes the *limitations* of the city-in-a-mirror simile, at least when that simile is applied to the totality of all consciousness, not just to the individual consciousness of a particular person. Yogarāja states:

> Nevertheless, between the Light of consciousness — endowed as it is with the state of wonder — and the light of the mirror, there is the following difference — viz., the city, etc., that is judged to be different [from the mirror] as a reflection [in the mirror], appears in the perfectly pure mirror [only as an external form], but [an actual city] is in no way created by the mirror. Thus the conclusion that "this is an elephant" [as applying to what is seen] in the mirror would be erroneous[, for it is a reflection of an elephant, and the actual elephant is outside the mirror].
>
> On the other hand, Light [viz., consciousness], whose essence is the marvelous experience of itself [(i.e., the essence of consciousness is nondual)], makes manifest on its own surface, and out of its own free will, the [actual] universe, whose material cause is that same consciousness, [as is known] by considering that [the universe] is not different [from that consciousness].[47]

The point being made here is that the reflection of a city that appears in a physical mirror is just an image, not an actual bricks-and-mortar city, whereas the universe that appears in the mirror of consciousness is an actual universe. Moreover, the reflection of a city that appears in a physical mirror is caused by an actual city that exists outside the mirror, whereas the universe that appears in the mirror of consciousness is caused only by

45 Yogarāja's com. to *Paramārthasāra*, verse 8 (KSTS, vol. 7, pp. 25–26), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, pp. 98–99.

46 *Paramārthasāra*, verses 12–13 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 35), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, p. 112.

47 Yogarāja's com. to *Paramārthasāra*, verses 12–13 (KSTS, vol. 7, pp. 38–39), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, pp. 115–116.

consciousness itself. There is no inert universe, outside consciousness, that becomes known when it is reflected in a conscious soul somewhere. Rather, consciousness manifests actual cities and the like on the "canvas" of consciousness, without there being anything outside consciousness that is the source of those manifestations, and consciousness is then conscious of those manifestations by reason of being conscious of itself.

But as Yogarāja has previously explained, the mirror simile also describes the subject-object consciousness that occurs when sense objects are perceived in the intellect-mirror of embodied beings, and needless to say, things do exist outside the "intellect-mirror" of a particular physical body. Indeed, this point is explicit in chapter 3 of the *Tantrāloka*, wherein Abhinavagupta describes the sense organs as reflecting various aspects of the surrounding world and performing their perceiving function by means of that reflection. (See *Tantrāloka* 3.5–43.) At the individual level, therefore, the city-in-a-mirror simile applies without qualification. Whatever physical thing one might be perceiving through one's bodily senses, one is actually only conscious of one's own self in which that thing is being reflected and represented. Hence, one's sense of being separate from the content of one's consciousness is merely an illusion, like the illusion of depth that characterizes the reflection of a distant city in the flat surface of a mirror.

Moreover, according to the *Paramārthasāra*, the nondual consciousness of self that is illustrated by the city-in-a-mirror simile describes the consciousness of *all things*. And because even a clay jar is fully conscious, verse 74, discussing a person who is a knower of truth — a *jñānin* — states that "[t]he divine abode [(i.e., the locus of consciousness)] for him is his own body . . . or [if not his own, then] the body of another, or even an object, such as a jar."[48] Yogarāja elaborates this verse as follows: "Not only is the body [for the *jñānin*] the abode of the deity inasmuch as it is the dwelling place of consciousness, but as well, whatever [other] objects there are that are governed by consciousness, all of them are abodes of the deity for him [the *jñānin*]."[49]

The genius of the city-in-a-mirror simile is that it collapses subject and object into one without privileging either the subject side or the object side. All things are consciousness, but all things are also conscious. Thus, if *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism is categorized as idealism, it is very different from the unsettling notion that all things are merely the dream images of a remote dreamer. Rather, all things are the dream images of themselves, having their own intrinsic being despite being nothing but consciousness. This form of idealism, in other words, is a *diffuse* non-reductive idealism, and it can just as well be categorized as materialism.

Śaṅkara's Vedānta urged us to withdraw to the extreme subject side of the subject-object divide, identifying with a pure consciousness that had no form (*arūpa*) and no qualities (*nirguṇa*), and Śaṅkara declared that the objective world of differentiation was merely an unreal appearance (*ābhāsa*). But *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy instead eliminates the subject-object divide, declaring all objects to be conscious subjects, and all conscious subjects to be objects of their own consciousness. The result is a world that is every bit real, but whose underlying being is consciousness.

48 *Paramārthasāra*, verse 74 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 140), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, p. 252.

49 Yogarāja's com. to *Paramārthasāra*, verse 74 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 142), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, p. 254.

But if the world is real, then all its diversity is also real, and that diversity must have a source in God's own being. Drawing from the pre-Śaṅkaran theories of Bhartṛhari (5th century C.E.), *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy posits a God that is Speech (*vāc*) and Word (*śabda*), thus giving specific form and content to God's inner being. As I explain in Part Seven of my book, all the dynamic diversity of the world exists outside time as God's eternal unchanging essence, and in the time dimension, that essence plays out as the pulse (*spanda*) of creation and dissolution, a pulse that occurs both on a cosmic scale and in the arising and subsiding of every thought.

5. Baruch Spinoza

> By decree of the angels and by the command of the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza . . . . Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law. But you that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day.
>
> — Decree of Excommunication against Baruch Spinoza (Amsterdam, July 27, 1656, C.E.)[50]

a. Baruch Becomes Benedictus

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677 C.E.) was a philosopher who saw truth in things that are counterintuitive, and like other innovative thinkers before him, he was criticized and rejected for his ideas. But notwithstanding the local community's curse that "the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven," Spinoza's name is today known and respected throughout the world. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832 C.E.) praised Spinoza as "a sedative for my passions," adding that Spinoza seemed to open up for him "a great and free outlook over the sensible and moral world." In poetry, Albert Einstein wondered at the extent of his great love for Spinoza, exclaiming, "How I love this noble man. More than I can say with words." David Ben-Gurion sought to have the decree of excommunication against Spinoza rescinded, and people from all backgrounds continue to read Spinoza's books and letters, they contemplate and discuss his ideas, and they admire the simple austerity of his way of life.

Spinoza was a Dutch Jew whose family immigrated to Holland from Portugal, where they had been forced to practice their Jewish faith in secret. Spinoza was raised and educated in a traditional Jewish manner, but even as a young man, he proved to be a revolutionary thinker, resulting in his excommunication at age 23. He then changed his name from Baruch (Hebrew for "blessing") to Benedictus (Latin for "blessing") and quickly became famous for his expertise in Cartesian philosophy. But Spinoza was not an uncritical follower of René Descartes (1596–1650 C.E.). Rather, he recognized the problems that beset Descartes's thought-matter dualism, and he boldly asserted that thought and matter are the same thing. In other words, Spinoza's answer to the mind-body

50 Nadler, Steven, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge Univ. Press 1999), p. 120.

problem was very similar to what we have already encountered in *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism.

The *Pratyabhijñā* texts persuasively argue that consciousness is universal, not individual; that it is nondual, not riven in two by an unbridgeable subject-object divide; and that it is the underlying being of all things, not just that of human souls. And Spinoza's ideas so closely conform to those same principles that one might wonder whether he had access to South Asian sources, perhaps as a result of contacts between European Jews and Jews living in Persia. It is intriguing to speculate about such connections, but I think multiple independent discovery better explains the close parallel between *Pratyabhijñā* nondualism and the nondual ideas of the great 17th century Dutch-Jewish philosopher.

What is most relevant to us, however, is that Spinoza picks up where *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism leaves off, filling in numerous details and adding a measure of precision and logical rigor that is sometimes lacking in the Sanskrit texts. Therefore, whether Spinoza arrived at his ideas independently or drew them indirectly from South Asian sources, his contribution to nondual thought cannot be discounted.

b. Spinoza's Answer to the Mind-Body Problem

Spinoza's primary philosophical work, the *Ethics*, presents his theories in the form of a mathematical proof. Writing to his friend Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society, Spinoza said: "But I can think of no better way of demonstrating these things clearly and briefly than to prove them in the Geometric manner and subject them to your understanding." (Letter 2 [IV/8/10–20].) In the *Ethics*, this "geometric manner" of proof comes to its full fruition, complete with definitions, axioms, propositions, demonstrations, corollaries, lemmas, and postulates. Using these tools, Spinoza makes his way, point by point, from first principles to the most profound philosophical conclusions, attempting to apply only irrefutable logical reasoning at each step. But the language Spinoza employs is specially and precisely defined, and his conclusions are often counterintuitive when compared to the Cartesian dualism of everyday human experience. As a result, a student of Spinoza can spend a day, or a lifetime, studying a single paragraph of the *Ethics*.

As noted, Spinoza was one of the leading experts of his time on Cartesian philosophy, and he employs many Cartesian terms and ideas in his own philosophical works, albeit with a few important distinctions. Both Descartes and Spinoza use the term "substance" (*substantia*), but contrary to Descartes, Spinoza concludes that only one infinite, eternal, and self-sufficient substance exists, and that it is God. (*Ethics*, IP11 and IP14.) Specifically, Spinoza defines "substance" as that in which other things inhere but which itself inheres in no other thing. Spinoza says: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed." (*Id.*, ID3.) In other words, substance is the ground of being. Modes, by contrast, are "the affections of a substance" (*id.*, ID5); they are the things that inhere in substance. One could say that the relationship of modes to substance is analogous to the relationship of waves to water, or that of a clay jar to raw clay, or that of a gold ornament to molten gold, and all these analogies might bring to mind the analogies Śaṅkara uses to describe the relationship of the diverse world to Brahman. On this basis, many scholars

have persuasively argued that Spinoza's divine "substance" and Śaṅkara's Brahman are one and the same.

But Śaṅkara and Spinoza draw different conclusions from the dependent relationship implied by inherence. Śaṅkara would argue that because waves inhere in water, only the water is real, and the waves — which are temporal — are unreal. By contrast, Spinoza would argue that both the water and the waves are perfectly real, although he would agree that the waves are temporal. Spinoza, like the *Pratyabhijñā* philosophers, understands the ever-changing dynamic diversity of the world to be an expression, in the dimension of time, of God's eternal essence. Hence, the modes are real because they are God, or "substance," comprehended in temporal terms. He says: "The difference between Eternity and Duration arises from this. For it is only of Modes that we can explain the existence by Duration. But of Substance [we can explain the existence] by Eternity . . . ." (Letter 12 [IV/54/15–55/5].) We have seen that Śaṅkara identifies God, or Brahman, with the extreme subject side of the subject-object divide. Thus, Brahman is pure consciousness, without form (*arūpa*) and without qualities (*nirguṇa*), and the ever-changing objective world is an unreal appearance (*ābhāsa*) in that consciousness. By contrast, Spinoza gives form and content to God's inner being, and by doing so, he gives reality to the ever-changing world.

Following Descartes, Spinoza uses the term "extension" (i.e., spatial dimension) to describe the material world in the abstract, and he uses the phrase "mode of extension" to describe, among other things, distinct material objects. He uses the term "body" in a broad sense, including within the scope of that term inorganic things such as planetary bodies. A body, for Spinoza, is a thing that moves or rests as a unified whole (see *Ethics*, IIP13, L1), and Spinoza accepts, too, that a body might be built up from other smaller bodies (*id*., IIP13, L3, "Definition").

Spinoza uses the term "idea" for a distinct thought. He says: "By idea I understand a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing." (*Ethics*, IID3.) He also sometimes uses the phrase "mode of thinking" in a similar way, especially when discussing abstract concepts like time.

As noted, Spinoza's most profound point of departure from Cartesian philosophy is his assertion of thought-matter equivalence. More specifically, Spinoza argues that thought and matter are not distinct "substances" (i.e., the "thinking substance" and the "extended substance") but rather two "attributes" of the same substance — two ways, that is, of comprehending a single thing.[51] And because thought and matter are really one, the world of thought and the world of matter are perfectly isomorphic. In other words, every thought is also a material thing, and material thing is also a thought. Therefore, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes:

> The order and connection of ideas [(i.e., thoughts)] is the same as the order and connection of things [(i.e., material things, etc.)]. (*Ethics*, IIP7.)
>
> [T]he thinking substance [(i.e., thought)] and the extended substance [(i.e., matter)] are one and the same

51 On hearing that Spinoza considered thought and matter to be "attributes" of a single "substance," some experts in Hindu philosophy will immediately think of Rāmānuja's *Viśiṣṭādvaita* school of Vedānta. But Spinoza uses these terms in a way that is quite different from Rāmānuja's usage, and therefore, despite a superficial similarity, Spinoza's philosophy is not at all like that of Rāmānuja. I discuss the distinction briefly in my book.

> substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension [(i.e., a distinct material object)] and the idea of that mode [(i.e., the thought that corresponds to that object)] are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways. (*Id*., IIP7, Schol.)

In the above quotation, after the phrase "a mode of extension," I added, as a clarification, "a distinct material object," and after the phrase "the idea of that mode," I added "the thought that corresponds to that object." The latter emendation needs to be explained. Some casual readers of Spinoza might argue that the phrase "the idea of that mode" refers to the mental image a person has of a particular object when observing that object. Thus, if "a mode of extension" is an apple, then "the idea of that mode" is the apple-thought in the mind of a person observing the apple. Although that reading of Spinoza has a certain intuitive appeal, most scholars reject it.

Thought-matter equivalence does not mean that a person's apple-thought is the same thing as a material apple sitting in a bowl of fruit on a table; rather, it means that a person's apple-thought is the same thing as a physical brain representing an apple in the form of neural spiking frequencies. Indeed, if Spinoza were claiming an equivalence between a person's apple-thought and a material apple sitting in a bowl of fruit, his philosophy would be incoherent. After all, many people might simultaneously observe the same material apple, and each would then have a different mental image of that apple, which would be incompatible with the one-to-one correspondence Spinoza claims to exist between thought and matter.

In order to appreciate more fully Spinoza's assertion of thought-matter equivalence, one needs to stop thinking in terms of subject-object consciousness and recall that all consciousness is really consciousness of self. One does not know any external thing except by its reflection in one's own being. One is conscious of only one's own self, but one perceives one's own self as a vast and diverse external world. As Spinoza explains, "[t]he human Mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its own Body." (*Ethics*, IIP26.) Because consciousness is nondual in this way, the only "idea" (i.e., thought) that corresponds to a material apple is the apple's thought of itself, not the thought some remote person might be having of it, and the only "mode of extension" (i.e., material thing) that corresponds to a person's apple-thought is the person's own brain, which is configured to represent an apple. In short, when Spinoza asserts that "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing" (*Ethics*, IIP7, Schol.), he is necessarily making a statement about the thought a material thing has *of itself*, not the thought a remote observer might be having of it.

With the benefit of that clarification, we are ready to consider Spinoza's answer to the mind-body problem. Spinoza discusses "the object of the idea constituting the human mind." (*Ethics*, IIP12.) Here, for reasons just explained, he cannot possibly be referring to some remote object — such as an apple — that the human mind might be thinking about. Rather, based on the theory of thought-matter equivalence, Spinoza is necessarily referring to something that actually *is* the human mind but in a material form. In other words, he is referring to some material thing whose thought of itself gives rise to the human mind, meaning that whatever occurs

physically in that material thing necessarily corresponds to a thought in that mind. As Spinoza puts it, "[w]hatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human Mind . . . there will necessarily be an idea of that thing in the Mind; i.e., if the object of the idea constituting a human Mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived by the Mind." (*Ethics*, IIP12.) And what could such a "body" be if not a *human* body, or some component of a human body, such as the brain and nervous system? Therefore, Spinoza concludes: "The object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the [human] Body, or a certain mode of Extension which actually exists, and nothing else." (*Ethics*, IIP13.) That powerful statement resolves the mind-body problem by boldly asserting that the mind *is* the body (or some component of it).

Thus, Spinoza completely rejects the consciousness-matter dualism that Śaṅkara so strongly insisted upon. Śaṅkara focused on the extreme subject side of the subject-object divide. On that basis, he asserted that consciousness is one and indivisible, and that it appears to be differentiated only because it illuminates different material vessels. But Śaṅkara further argued that consciousness and matter are completely distinct, and derivatively, he argued that the mind and body are also distinct. He said: "[T]he characteristics of the Spirit [(i.e., consciousness)] do not attach themselves to the body nor do those of the body to the Spirit."[52] Spinoza asserts exactly the opposite. For Spinoza, the mind *is* the body.

Moreover, because thought and matter are actually the same thing comprehended in two different ways, Spinoza universalizes his assertion of mind-body equivalence. All material bodies, everywhere, have minds, at least when the word "mind" is understood in the broadest possible sense. Thus, all things are in some sense conscious, but Spinoza qualifies that assertion, noting that the perceptive capacity of any particular "mind" depends on the suppleness (i.e., the receptivity) of the material thing that has that mind. Spinoza explains:

> For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to [human beings] than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. . . . And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human Body must also be said of the idea of any [material] thing. [¶] . . . [I]n proportion as a Body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. (*Ethics*, IIP13, Schol.)

Finally, Spinoza asserts that insofar as a material thing has the suppleness and receptivity that makes its mind more perceptive, its mind also becomes more aware of itself. As Spinoza puts it,

> [t]he Mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body. (*Ethics*, IIP23.)
>
> On the other hand, he who has a Body capable of a great many things, has a Mind which considered only in itself

52 *Bhagavadgītābhāṣya* XIII, 2, translated in Warrier, A.G. Krishna, *Srīmad Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya of Sri Saṁkarācārya, With Text in Devanagiri & English Rendering, and Index of First Lines of Verses* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, 3d impression, 1983), p. 407.

is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things. (*Id*., VP39, Schol.)

By way of summary, a "mind" according to Spinoza is the thought a material thing has of itself, and it only becomes a thought about some external thing when, by force of evolution, it sees past itself to draw inferences about the world that surrounds it. But Spinoza also recognizes that even the phrase "thought of itself" implies a dualism of thought and matter. We still have on the one side a thought and on the other side some material thing. Spinoza closes that gap by asserting that the thought and the material thing are one and the same; they are two attributes of a single "substance," which Spinoza equates with God.

If we go just one step further — a step that Spinoza doesn't take, but one that fits — we can say that Spinoza's "substance" is what we have been referring to as "nondual consciousness of self." But we have to be careful here because Spinoza uses the word "conscious" (*conscia*), as we do in English, to refer to subject-object consciousness. (See, e.g., *Ethics*, VP31, Schol., VP39, Schol., VP42, Schol.)[53] When I say that Spinoza's "substance" is nondual consciousness of self, I am not referring to the subject side of the subject-object divide. Rather, I am referring to a direct consciousness of self that is based on being, not on knowing. I am referring, in other words, to what Jean-Paul Sartre called "*conscience non positionnelle (de) soi*."[54] It is that nondual consciousness that appears to us as the duality of thought and matter, just as the flat surface of a mirror reflecting a distant city appears to have depth.

53 On Spinoza's use of the word "conscious," see Garrett, Don, *Nature and Necessity in Spinoza's Philosophy* (Oxford Univ. Press 2018), pp. 396–397, 404–405, 408–410, 415–423.

54 Jean-Paul Sartre's use of this phrase is discussed in my book.

c. Comparison to *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism

The parallel between Spinoza's answer to the mind-body problem and *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism is striking. Spinoza's core philosophical insight is his assertion of thought-matter equivalence: "[T]he thinking substance [(i.e., thought)] and the extended substance [(i.e., matter)] are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that." (*Ethics*, IIP7, Schol.) But seven centuries earlier, Somānanda had already articulated the same thought-matter equivalence, saying, "a clay jar, by comprehending its own self, exists."[55] According to Somānanda, the existence of a thing is nothing other than its thought of itself, and he added that a thing's thought of itself is nothing other than God's thought of it.[56] And the latter point, too, is one Spinoza made: "[And f]or of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human Body. And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human Body [(i.e., that it is the human mind)] must also be said of the idea of any thing [(i.e., that it is the mind of that thing)]." (*Ethics*, IIP13, Schol.) Thus, according to both Somānanda and Spinoza, God's thought of a thing suffices to make that thing conscious, or put another way, each thing's consciousness of itself is the same thing as God's consciousness of it.[57]

And as we have seen, Yogarāja elaborated Somānanda's philosophical insight, explaining that all things are conscious (i.e., conscious of themselves), but only organisms that have sense organs, a central nervous system, and a brain are constructed in such a way that the universal nondual

55 *Śivadṛṣṭi* 5.34 (KSTS, vol. 54, p. 187).

56 See *Śivadṛṣṭi* 5.105–110.

57 See Garrett, *Nature and Necessity*, pp. 393–414, esp. 410.

consciousness takes the form of an individual soul knowing an external material world.

If Spinoza had been schooled in 11th century Kashmir, his ideas could not have tracked Yogarāja's ideas more closely. Spinoza, like Yogarāja, concluded that everything has a mind. (*Ethics*, IIP13, Schol.) In other words, everything has the thought of itself. But "in proportion as a Body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once" — that is, in proportion to the development of its sense organs, nervous system, and brain — "so its Mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once." (*Ibid.*) And, insofar as a body becomes more capable of that sort of multifaceted and nuanced perception, its mind becomes more cognizant of external things, for "[t]he human Mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the affections of its own Body." (*Id.*, IIP26; see also *id.*, IIP13, Schol.) And, at the same time, its mind becomes cognizant of itself as the knower of those external things, for "[t]he Mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the Body." (*Id.*, IIP23.) And thus arises the illusion of the subject-object divide — the awareness, that is, of a mind perceiving an external world. As Spinoza said, "he who has a Body capable of a great many things, has a Mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself . . . and of things." (*Id.*, VP39, Schol.) And as Yogarāja likewise said, "whenever objects of sense such as sound . . . are apprehended in the mirror of intellect . . . — then, that same Self [(i.e., consciousness)], its form now fully manifest, is apprehended . . . ."[58]

But as we will recall, Abhinavagupta emphasized the inevitable inadequacy of empirical knowledge. He noted that the sense organs are necessarily imperfect mirrors, for each can only reflect (or represent) that which corresponds to its nature. (See *Tantrāloka* 3.5–43.) Moreover, this distortion is the underlying reason we experience subject-object duality where there is none, a point that Kṣemarāja also explained in his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*:

> When the highest Lord, whose very essence is consciousness, conceals, by His free will, pervasion of non-duality and assumes duality all round, then His will and other powers, though essentially non-limited, assume limitation. . . . By assuming extreme limitation, beginning with the acquisition of an inner organ [(i.e., the intellect, mind, ego, memory, etc.)] and organs of perception [(i.e., the sense organs)], [the universal consciousness] acquires *māyiya-mala*, which consists in the apprehension of all objects as different [from itself].[59]

Not surprisingly, Spinoza, too, emphasized the inadequacy of empirical knowledge: Because we know external things through the impression they make on our sense organs (*Ethics*, IIP26), and because such information is partial, mediated, and inferential, it is necessarily imperfect. Spinoza, who made his living as a lens grinder, providing spectacles and scientific instruments to the Dutch community, was keenly aware of the inadequacy of the information we receive by way of the eyes and other sense organs. He therefore asserted: "The idea of any affection of the human Body does not involve adequate knowledge of an external body."

58 Yogarāja's com. to *Paramārthasāra*, verse 8 (KSTS, vol. 7, p. 25), translated in Bansat-Boudon, *An Introduction to Tantric Philosophy*, p. 98.

59 *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, com. to *sūtra* 9 (KSTS, vol. 3, p. 21), translated in Singh, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, pp. 71–72.

(*Ethics*, IIP25.) Moreover, the effects a particular external thing has on our sense organs is muddled up with effects from many sources at once. Therefore, Spinoza added: "The ideas of the affections of the human Body . . . are not clear and distinct, but confused." (*Ethics*, IIP28.) And one result of this inadequate and confused knowledge of the world is the dualistic notion that we are immaterial thinking things and that the world is a material non-thinking thing, and that the two are ontologically distinct.

Spinoza's philosophical system is set forth and defended in exquisite detail in the *Ethics*, but Spinoza also summarized his philosophy in a letter he wrote to his friend Henry Oldenburg. In that letter, he described the entire universe as a single body with a single mind, and he described the human body and human mind as a finite participant in that infinite universal being. Here are Spinoza's words:

> [A]ll bodies are surrounded by others, and are determined by one another to existing and producing an effect in a fixed and determinate way, the same ratio of motion to rest always being preserved in all of them at once, [that is, in the whole universe]. From this it follows that every body, insofar as it exists modified in a definite way, must be considered as a part of the whole universe, must agree with its whole and must cohere with the remaining bodies. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> You see, therefore, how and why I think that the human Body is a part of Nature [(i.e., an interdependent and inseparable component of the whole)]. But as far as the human Mind is concerned, I think it is a part of Nature too. For I maintain that there is also in nature an infinite power of thinking, which, insofar as it is infinite, contains in itself objectively the whole of Nature, and whose thoughts proceed in the same way as Nature, its object, does. Next, I maintain that the human Mind is this same power, not insofar as it is infinite and perceives the whole of Nature, but insofar as it is finite and perceives only the human body. For this reason I maintain that the human Mind is a part of a certain infinite intellect. (Letter 32 [IV/172a/15–174a/10].)

As this letter describes, Spinoza understood the universe to be a single interdependent unity that is infinite, thus actualizing every possibility. And just as every individual thing has a mind (i.e., a thought of itself), likewise the universe, in its entirety, has a mind (i.e., a thought of itself). Spinoza called this universal mind the "infinite power of thinking," and he also called it the "infinite intellect of God," and whatever we might choose to call it, it necessarily exists because the material universe exists, and thought and matter are one.

And as for the human mind, it, according to Spinoza, is the fraction of that "infinite intellect" that has only the human body (or perhaps merely the human brain) as the direct content of its thought, being forced to infer things outside the body by interpreting their effects within the body.

Of course, Spinoza's assertion that the human mind is a part of the universal mind is familiar to us from *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism. It aligns with Somānanda assertion that an object's thought of itself is nothing other than Śiva's thought of it,[60] and it likewise aligns with Kṣemarāja's assertion that the "consciousness of Śiva alone is, in the highest sense, the self of the entire manifestation."[61] And because "the whole of nature is one Individual" (*Ethics*,

60 See *Śivadṛṣṭi* 5.105–109.

61 Kṣemarāja's com. to *Śiva Sūtras*, *sūtra* 1 (KSTS, vol. 1, p. 3), translated in Singh, *Śiva Sūtras*, pp. 5–6.

IIP13, L7, Schol.), each part affecting other parts and affected by other parts, there can be no reasoned basis for declaring any one part to be separate from the whole. Therefore, the human body is not really an independent entity, and for like reason, the human mind is not an independent entity. It only appears to be a distinct mind, but in truth, its thoughts are part of and determined by an infinite system of thought.

In summary, we find in Spinoza's writings all the principles that we have found in the leading texts of *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism. The core of the mind-body problem is the illusion of subject-object dualism. When the insight arises that all consciousness is really nondual consciousness of self, the mind-body problem disappears, and the riddle of consciousness is solved.

d. Neutral Monism — A Dream World That Is Real

Scholars have noticed numerous similarities between Spinoza's philosophy and Śaṅkara's Vedānta.[62] But despite these important similarities, we have seen that Spinoza's philosophy sharply differs from Śaṅkara's Vedānta as regards the status of the objective world. As Bina Gupta put it in her 1984 article for the *India Philosophical Quarterly*,

> [t]he intuitive knowledge of God which Spinoza seeks is a way to understand the world as it really is. It is not a flight from the material world, but a celebration of its essential nature and oneness. The pursuit of Brahman, on the other hand, implies repudiation of the world: it is a realization that Brahman is the only reality; the world is merely an appearance and the [individual soul] and Brahman are non-different.[63]

Gupta's observation is a valid one, but it is worth noting that in drawing this distinction between Spinoza's philosophy and Śaṅkara's Vedānta, Gupta and others identify the precise point that makes Spinoza's philosophy similar to *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy. Spinoza's philosophy, like *Pratyabhijñā* Shaivism, offers a synthesis of materialism and idealism, validating both. In both these philosophical systems, the physical world is real in every significant sense, adhering to immutable physical laws and expressing a real essence of God. But even so, every particle of this physical world corresponds to a thought of itself, and thought and matter are dual aspects of a nondual core.

Significantly, this "neutral monism" (neutral between materialism and idealism) resolves many of the problems often associated with other solutions to the mind-body problem. First, by denying the reality of thought-matter dualism, it solves the problem of how something immaterial (a mind) can have a causal effect on something material (a body). Thoughts cause thoughts, and material events cause material events, but the two progressions describe the same progression — their difference being only one of aspect.

In addition, neutral monism answers ontological questions about matter, space, and time, questions that the materialist leaves unanswered. Matter and thought are the same thing, and space and time are merely information.

Finally, neutral monism parries the accusation of solipsism that is often directed against idealism. The idealism that the *Pratyabhijñā* masters and Spinoza present to us is a *diffuse* non-reductive idealism in which perceived things have intrinsic being because they are themselves the locus of the consciousness that constitutes their

62 I summarize this body of scholarship in an appendix to my book.

63 Gupta, Bina, "Brahman, God, Substance and Nature: Samkara and Spinoza," in *India Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XI, no. 3 (1984), p. 281.

existence. They are not just dream images; they are also dreamers. The universal nondual consciousness delights in its consciousness of itself, and it is conscious of itself from countless perspectives, so as to delight in itself all the more.

In closing, I would like to relate the striking insights of this article to the theme of this edition of *Dogma*: "Metamorphosis and Perception." In devotional legend, it is said that Śaṅkara entered the body of King Amaruka in order to master the science of sexual love. But we might wonder, is it possible for an individual soul to enter the body of another — to see through that body's eyes, to touch through that body's fingers, etc. — but to remain otherwise unchanged and unaffected?

If all consciousness is consciousness of self, then the answer to that question is most certainly no. If, for example, "a clay jar, by comprehending its own self, exists" (Somānanda), and if "[c]onsciousness has as its essential nature [selfward-facing,] reflective awareness" (Utpaladeva), and if "[t]he object of the idea constituting the human Mind is the [human] Body . . . and nothing else" (Spinoza), then it must be that physical metamorphosis is inseparable from spiritual metamorphosis. And likewise, if thought and matter are the same thing, then becoming the body of another means becoming the soul of another and ceasing to be the soul that one previously was. But even so, at the highest level, all souls are one consciousness. Śaṅkara and King Amaruka were never really separate beings.

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